



**CONNECTICUT
ASSOCIATION
of NONPROFITS**

*...to serve, strengthen
and support Connecticut's
nonprofit community.*

**Testimony before the Planning & Development Committee
2.7.11**

**In Opposition of
HB 5142, AA Requiring Public Hearings on the Locations of Group Homes
HB 5259, AA Requiring Public Hearings on the Locations of Group Homes**

Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits) is the largest membership organization in Connecticut dedicated exclusively to working with nonprofits in Connecticut. We represent over 500 nonprofits, 300 of which hold purchase of service contracts with the state to provide health and human services on its behalf, many doing so in a group home setting. Due to the many challenges that providers already face with establishing group homes, we oppose HB 5142 and HB 5259 and respectfully request that you reject them.

Both bills, if passed, would require that public hearings be held prior to the approval of any new group home in a municipality. This poses a significant impediment to establishing much needed group homes in the community for a myriad of human services, including those for children and adults with physical, psychiatric, behavioral and intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, as well as for individuals reentering society after incarceration. However, siting issues already exist that often leave individuals in more costly settings, such as those with serious mental illnesses remaining in state hospital beds at \$1,200 per day.

At a time when the state is facing its largest budget deficit in history, it seems unwise to create more obstacles to establishing viable treatment options in the community. There continues to be a significant need to transition people, when appropriate, from institutional and hospital settings to less costly and restrictive levels of care in the community. Additionally, the state is currently looking for ways to provide services here in Connecticut for over 350 children under the care of DCF who are located in out-of-state facilities. Requiring public hearings prior to the approval of group homes to provide these levels of care in a community is an unnecessary barrier to needed services.

When considering halfway houses and other alternatives to incarceration, it is essential for legislators and Connecticut residents to understand that most offenders who enter prison will eventually return to the community. In Connecticut, more than 95% of prison inmates leave the prison system and re-enter society. Statistics universally support the correlation between supervised, community re-entry services and a reduction in recidivism. To this end, it is important to understand that supervised re-entry into the community and not a system of extended incarceration is critical to increasing public safety by ending the cycle of recidivism and strengthening and healing families in crisis. The Department of Correction (DOC) and the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch have jurisdiction over these facilities with multiple layers of security and accountability in place. These programs provide a structured, supervised environment with public safety and successful re-entry into the community as the primary objectives.

Most group homes run by nonprofits already have long-established protocols for working with the surrounding community. They maintain relationships with local elected officials, as well as police and fire departments. Several make it a point to hold open houses so that local residents can meet staff, learn about the services that will be provided and discuss any potential concerns. Nonprofit providers strive to ensure that the management of these homes blend their presence into the surrounding community as seamlessly as possible.

Another concern that we have with these bills is the violation of the American with Disabilities Act and potential for discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The Equal Protection Clause of the Connecticut State Constitution guarantees people with disabilities protection from discrimination as a protected class, the same as it does for race, religion, etc. Requiring public hearings to discuss the approval of their residence in a community is simply unacceptable and is surely not something the state would consider for other protected classes.

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Keeping individuals in the community remains the best option for the state, both financially and in terms of treatment. Successful treatment/rehabilitation and the ability of individuals to gain or regain as much independence as possible are intrinsically related to maintaining community ties. Creating unnecessary obstacles to these services is not in the best interest of the state, its municipalities or the individuals seeking services in their community. For that reason, we urge your rejection of HB 5142 and HB 5259.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

For questions, please contact Liza Andrews, Public Policy Director, at landrews@ctnonprofits.org or (860) 525-5080.